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# Still The King of MXGP

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

Red Bull KTM Factory rider Antonio Cairoli isn't just a little special. We already know what he has done in the sport, and that alone makes him pretty close to being the greatest Grand Prix rider of all time. Of course, stats wise, Stefan Everts is still the man, but the Sicilian is closing in fast on the Belgian and his records. Just as he did in Ottobiano, Italy two weeks ago, last weekend Cairoli showed the young charger, Jeffrey Herlings how it's done. Both riders getting a moto win, and both getting a second-place finish, but it was Cairoli who showed his vast experience with a clinical ride in the second moto, breaking away from Herlings early and controlling the race from the front.



Now with 82 Grand Prix victories to his name, and heading towards his ninth world motocross championship, the KTM rider continues to show us just how great he really is.

Like Joel Robert, Roger DeCoster, Georges Jobe, Eric Geboers, Joel Smets, or Stefan Everts before him, his talent isn't just in winning races and Grand Prix's, but showing the world what is possible, when we all think it isn't.

With a 91 point lead over second placed man Clement Desalle in the series points, 94 point lead over third placed man Gautier Paulin, and 95 points over Jeffrey Herlings, the Italian can really be careful in the following races in Czech Republic, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, USA, Holland, and France, but the question is, will he?

He seems intent on showing the world, he still has the speed to match anyone in the sport, even that young lion Herlings.

I was once again honoured to speak to the current King of GP racing, and he once again gave us some really interesting answers.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Antonio, how did you feel last weekend?

**Cairolì:** I felt really good, it's the first time I've won in Portugal with KTM, so I'm really happy with that, and it's also the first time that I've won two races (GPs) in a row this year.

**Motocross Illustrated:** How did you feel in the opening moto?

**Cairolì:** In the first moto, after a really good start, I was struggling a little bit as I just couldn't find a good rhythm and Jeffrey, who was faster in some sections of the track, passed me. After a period of chasing him down I started to feel a bit tired and he managed to pull a good gap on me, despite my best efforts. Eventually I started to feel better and I managed to close in on him, but it was too late to try for the victory.

**Motocross Illustrated:** And the second moto?

**Cairolì:** In the second moto I was feeling good, I found some better lines and did my best to pull away. By two thirds distance I had a decent gap that, happily, I was able to manage until the finish line. I'm really pleased with how the Championship is going and I'm looking forward to the races that are coming up soon.

**Motocross Illustrated:** What will you do between now and Loket?

**Cairolì:** Now I will take a week of rest and then we will be training and testing on the hard pack in Italy, before heading to Loket at the end of the month. My thoughts go to my fam-















ily and to all the people that live in my home town of Patti, that suffered a disastrous fire during the week.

**Motocross Illustrated:** I am not sure how you saw the weekend before in Italy, but to me I think it was a pretty special moment in your career, because you fought off the young lion (Jeffrey Herlings) and was able to fight him off. How did you feel?

**Cairoli:** No, it was not really a special moment. It's a race like the other ones. He is one opponent just like the others. For sure he is a good sand rider and its good we could fight there. Its normally a good track for him, but also for me, because I like soft ground.

**Motocross Illustrated:** I remember two years ago, when you were in the middle of your two years of injury. A lot of us wrote you off, me included, but you said to me we haven't seen the best of Antonio Cairoli. Are we seeing the best Antonio Cairoli now, or is the best to come?

**Cairoli:** No, it is still coming. For sure we are leading the championship, so we can not to strange or stupid things, so we cannot go on the limit, we cannot risk anything. We are on a good level, but for sure we are not on the limit.

**Motocross Illustrated:** But is this the best Antonio Cairoli until now? Better than 2005, or 2009, or all those other years?

**Cairoli:** It's always better. I think you must improve, otherwise you can better stop. If you don't grow, you go backwards and I always want to grow, I want to improve, otherwise I stop. If I have to ride for fifth, sixth or eighth place, then I stop. While I am still fighting for the win, that means I am still growing, because the others are also growing, every year they get better.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Watching Ottobiano unfold I was thinking maybe Jeffrey was waiting to pounce, but when he did it seemed that you were actually waiting to make your break. Was your plan to let him think he was going to be able to get you and then run away?

**Cairoli:** It's just, I have some experience, for some years. He is younger than me and he has less experience. Sometimes you need to see what others are doing, why they are catching you, maybe he had better lines, so for me it was important to watch what he was doing and why was he fast in some spots. I wasn't waiting, just wanting to see what he had in the tank.

**Motocross Illustrated:** How important is the mental side, maybe more than 50%?

**Cairoli:** I think the mental side is very important. You can be the most talented guy, or the









most trained rider, but mentally, you need to know yourself, you need to know your limits and that is very important, to know when you can push.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Everybody thinks Jeffrey is the next big thing, the guy to replace you when you stop. You have been the guy for the last 12 years. What do you think?

**Cairolì:** I think he is a good rider, a big talent, a lot of championships. To be a champion you need a lot of things, you need to be fast, you need to be talented, like I said before, you need a lot of stuff. I hope for him he has these things and if he doesn't have it, he can develop these things. Maybe we can have good battles for the years I am still riding. Then after he can fight with other guys. Tim, he is also very fast, a good talent, he is also very young. For the long future, it's Tim and Jeffrey, they are the guys for the future and the fights.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Just two more questions. Trentino, and Ottobiano, two Italian GP's and two special performances, also a lot of support from your countrymen. It's like the Italian crowds are the best crowds. It used to be the French or the British, but the Italian crowds are just amazing when you win. How does that feel for you, do you get emotional?

**Cairolì:** Yes, for sure I get emotional. I like that the motocross grows so much in Italy and also the whole of Europe. I do my best to deal with the other media, outside of motocross, and from other sports or not even from sports. It is important that all the riders do this and open their mind to the social media, and other media. If we can't have it via television, then we need to expose ourselves to this. It isn't nice they show the snooker, but motocross is a special sport. I think television can be better, but we all do our best.

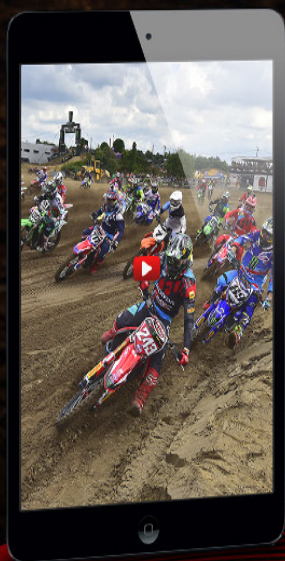
**Motocross Illustrated:** Last question. Your friend and also a legend in his sport Valentino Rossi is proving he can continue to win, winning in Assen the same day you won in Ottobiano. I think he is like 38 or something. How much motivation do you get from him, and how much respect do you have for such a legend in his own sport?

**Cairolì:** We always have a chat after the races. He is a good example for me, because he also never gives up and he put a lot of effort to make MotoGP as big as possible, because for sure without him, it isn't as big as it is with him. For sure you can ride longer in MotoGP while motocross is physically demanding but mentally, that is tough in both sports and mentally he is very strong and everyone can learn from him.



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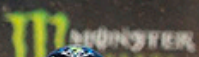
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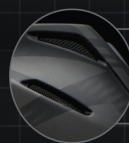
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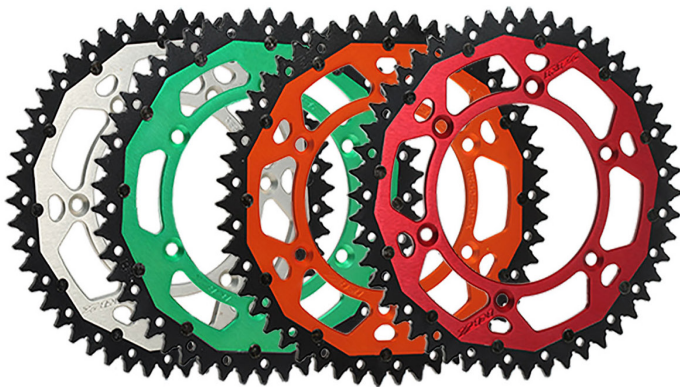


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# The Future Is Bright

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

Red Bull KTM Factory rider Jeffrey Herlings has proven time and time again, he will be the man when Antonio Cairoli calls it time on his career, and who knows, maybe the Flying Dutchman can actually take his place while the Italian legend is still around. Last weekend in Agueda, Portugal, Herlings went 1-2 for second overall, and showed that he isn't far off the pace of Cairoli. When you consider this is the best Antonio Cairoli we have ever seen, then you have to give the young 22-year-old props for his performances.

Now just a handful of points off second place in the MXGP points. Herlings has set his goal to finish second in the championship, and give KTM a well-deserved first and second in the end of season standings.

As always, we caught up with Herlings and asked him about his recent performances, and his goals for the USGP in September.

**Motocross Illustrated:** How did you feel on Sunday in Portugal?

**Herlings:** It is a bit frustrating being second again and we were closer than we were last weekend but it is something to build and work on. We did some good things for the championship because only a few rounds ago I was almost 50 points back and now it is 5-or-something to second place: that's quite impressive. So, I'm happy for that and I didn't lose points to Cairoli today. [Getting to] second in the championship will not be so bad and everyone has worked so hard in the team. To go 1-2 would be amazing for KTM. My starts were good again today by the way and we are getting better and better.

**Motocross Illustrated:** You have improved your starts, but again in some races you struggle. Your qualification start wasn't that good, and Sunday they were ok, but not great. Are you happy with your starts?

**Herlings:** On Saturday, I thought the gate was going down and I released my clutch, and the gate didn't go down and I messed up. Russia,

I was second in the first moto in the start, second in the turn in the second moto, then I tipped over. Italy, I was like third and fifth or something, so I was happy going into Portugal.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Can you tell me about last week, what happened?

**Herlings:** What happened, the heat got me man. I got sick on the Tuesday before, going jet skiing with some friends. I was totally burned, red like hell, and I got sick, fever, stomach cramps, throwing up, diarrhea. I couldn't eat, because if I did I would just throw up, or have to sit on the toilet. We tried to keep it a secret, because we didn't want (Antonio) anyone to know. I wanted to go for the win. As you could see I faded on the end and I was so sick for the second moto I didn't want to line up. I didn't want to eat because I felt so bad. After the second moto I was leading, but I had no power left. After the moto, I just collapsed and fell over and next thing I know I was in the medical centre.

**Motocross Illustrated:** It seemed like when Antonio blocked your passing move, it really slowed your momentum. Given your health, I can imagine that totally ruined your race as far as being able to get going again and getting your rhythm back?

**Herlings:** I was already done, but three laps to go. I think had I passed him, I could have maybe won the moto, but he block passed















me, and then he sprinted away in a couple of turns and it was done. I couldn't be bothered giving it one more shot. I tried to save energy for the second moto, but I was just done.

**Motocross Illustrated:** So, were you concerned your body hadn't recovered from Italy?

**Herlings:** I felt terrible between Italy and Portugal and I was on the IV and knocked out. I just layed on the couch all week, and I never do that. As you saw I did just one fast lap in first practice and timed practice and the heat race I was ok, just rode a safe race and finished sixth or something. I felt good in Portugal, no stomach cramps or diarrhea, and I just had a little head ache on Saturday.

**Motocross Illustrated:** The track looked easy, so I guess that is good for your condition?

**Herlings:** No, it wasn't rough at all. I hoped they would actually rip it and get some water down to make more lines. It was fast and easy. I wanted them to make it better for Sunday after Saturday, but they didn't do that. With the weather 25 degrees, and wind, it dries the track out pretty quickly.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Despite the losing to Antonio, you made up a lot of ground on the other guys (Desalle and Paulin). You must be happy with that?

**Herlings:** I can't wait for Lommel to get my revenge. I mean Ottobiano was his home ground and Lommel is mine. I hope the weather is like 10 degrees (laughing), that would suit me better. I am white, so I need to be cold. No just kidding. I want my revenge.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Obviously Lommel and Assen coming up. You have only won one Grand Prix this year, I mean going a full season with one GP win, that isn't what you were hoping for?

**Herlings:** I had a lot of podiums, first loser I guess, more than the first winner. It sucks being second give times, but I have been on the podium a lot and as you mentioned during the week on your website, I have scored more points than









anyone else in the last five or six rounds. It doesn't bring me anything, but I know I am fourth in the championship and I am right on De-salle and Paulin. If I can get second in the championship, then we can be proud and give KTM one and two in the championship. We have some great people in this team.

**Motocross Illustrated:** The USGP, you and Antonio are in good form, in fact a lot of you are. Would that be a goal to kick Tomac's ass, because he obviously won easy last year.

**Herlings:** Is he going to be there?

**Motocross Illustrated:** Yes, it is in his contract to be at the USGP. Baggett will be there as will all the top US riders, but I don't think you will lap him like you did in Lommel, at least not at Gaterback.

**Herlings:** No, I won't lap him there.

**Motocross Illustrated:** But how much do you look forward to racing those guys?

**Herlings:** With Tony leading the championship, he is the guy to look out for, and Tomac, I don't know if he is leading the championship yet, but everyone knows he is one of the fastest guys. To see those two, go head to head, and me and Baggett going head to head. I would love that. I think American riders on American dirt, they are hard to beat, they always go better. Tomac is a gnarly guy. I know him well and he knows me, and we respect each other. It would be cool to be with so many good guys on the same track.

**Motocross Illustrated:** Malcolm Stewart mentioned he likes you a lot, and you guys seem to get on really well. He said you need to catch up when you are in Florida for the USGP. Will you catch up with him?

**Herlings:** I promised I would drop around. He lives like two hours from the USGP facility, and it's always been a dream of mine to ride at the Stewart compound. I am a big fan of James. It's been my dream to ride there for years and James is the most gnarly dude on a bike, and it would be good to see those guys.





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# A Sizeable Change in MXGP

Story Geoff Meyer and David Bulmer Images Ray Archer

Suzuki Factory rider Arminas Jasikonis might just be the find of the 2017 season. With grand battles between Antonio Cairoli, Jeffrey Herlings and Tim Gajser, plus a few GP victories for the likes of Clement Desalle and Gautier Paulin, it has been a season of many highlights. While the old guard of Cairoli, Desalle and Paulin fight of the young breed of Herlings, Gajser and Anstie, there is another story unfolding in the shadows of the main men. They say size doesn't matter, but it seems the Lithuanian Giant, Arminas Jasikonis is very much the strength of Suzuki's challenge to the KTM and HRC throne in the MXGP class. A 19-year-old who has improved out of this world in the last six months, but more so in the last six weeks.















The Suzuki rider first started making headlines with a strong performance in the Grand Prix of Latvia, finishing with a third place in a moto, but he shocked the world with the qualification race win in Portugal a little over a week ago. Showing maturity as he was hounded by GP veteran Max Nagl, the Lithuanian really impressed.

“It was tough mentally. That final lap I had to concentrate. The start was difficult because it was very muddy. I want to thank my team and everyone. I was trying to ride calm, not make many mistakes and I led for the whole race and took the win. It was amazing for me, and I am really happy. It was coming at a moment that is was tough in my head and I had to reset myself, because I was making mistakes, and then I pulled a gap again and it was a good gap to win. I don’t put bit pressure on my shoulders, do what I did today. Try and fix my start and get a good start and enjoy the riding.”

He then backed that up with a podium finish on Sunday in Portugal, his first, but for sure not his last.

“The second moto in Portugal was really tough. I was again around fifth at the beginning after making a little mistake on an uphill. I ran most of the moto in fifth place, with Tim Gajser and Nagl in front of me and I knew that if Nagl stayed there I wouldn’t get the podium so I really put a big effort into this race. I had to finish in front of him and gave everything I had to make that happen. I made a really nice pass on Gajser and then a couple of laps later I got the pass on Nagl as well, doing what I needed to do for my first ever podium performance.

Without the support of his Suzuki Factory team none of this would be possible, and Jasikonis knows this and respects the people around him.

“I’d like to give a big thanks to the team, they have done such a great job to help me get here. Thanks to Paul my mechanic, thanks to Stefan and Harry Everts and everyone in the team who works so hard. I just hope this podium pays them back for all









their effort. And thanks to my family and my girlfriend who always support me and believe in me, and all the fans who cheer me on. It means so much to get that support and I hope now that this is the start of even better things to come for me in the Suzuki World MXGP team.”

While that podium finish in Portugal might be a nice reward for hard work, and a determined mind set, Jasikonis is looking forward to the future rounds of this year’s world motocross championship and you can be sure, he will be ready to once again stand on the podium.

“It is really nice, really nice. When you look at how many people know me, and everything is nice. Race by race better results, it’s really good. I think it’s coming in Assen and Lommel, my key points there. Of course, I will try and do the same, but I really want to improve on the hard pack. I struggle in the starts and that is where I need to improve.”

#### **Profile Arminas Jasikonis**

Machine	RM-Z450-WS
Date of Birth	September 12, 1997
Nationality	Lithuanian
Home Town	Balen
Height	1m 96cm
Weight	92kg
Marital Status	Single
Hair Colour	Brown
Eye Colour	Blue
Hobbies	BMX, swimming, cycling
Likes	Sports
Dislikes	Bad races
Favourite Movie	Many ones
Favourite Food	Chinese food
Favourite Circuit	Many
First Race	2001 Lithuanian Championship
Racing Hero	Stefan Everts, Ricky Carmichael
Greatest Moment	1st GP
Ambition	Be a top rider in the MXGP class





# seven

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